

Autoanalysis, with particular reflections on sociology

Journal of Classical Sociology

2021, Vol. 21(3-4) 263–279

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DOI: 10.1177/1468795X211032418

journals.sagepub.com/home/jcs**Bridget Fowler**

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Abstract

This article aims to contribute to a sociology of knowledge via an autoanalysis of a marginalised member of the British upper-middle class, who moved first from the South to the North of England and then from England to Scottish society as an immigrant: a ‘stranger who stayed’. Written in the first person, Bridget Fowler’s reflections move between different religious and political worlds, focusing especially on her reception of conflicting sociological theories and her own development through these. Influenced by five exceptionally learned and lucid sociologists – John Rex, Herminio Martins, Raymond Williams, Pierre Bourdieu and Terry Lovell – she has spent her sociological career contributing to the demystification of power in various forms. In particular she has focused on the significance of secular culture – notably literature – in creating hegemonic domination. She has also analysed the role of symbolic revolutions in social transformation, avoiding in this respect falling either into idealism or simplistic class reductionism. Arguing that sociological theory still needs to teach Marx, Weber and Durkheim, these founding figures should not be seen as creating – in social scientific terms – a unified architectural construction, but should be read with and against one another; further, they need also to be combined with other, more contemporary, influences. Finally whilst noting the existential salience of movements around identity – nation, gender, sexuality and disability – she argues that the discipline must continue to reach out ‘beyond the fragments’, to address social totalities more broadly, including wider issues of social space and structures of power.

Keywords

Bourdieu, class, Lovell, Martins, theory, transformation, Williams

As one of the ‘under-labourers’ of sociology (cf. Winch), I am conscious that my experiences are neither here nor there compared with those who have made symbolic revolutions. Nevertheless, in the spirit of applying the discipline’s concern with the popular voice to our own history, I offer some reflections, situated within a brief autoanalysis. In this, I shall sketch out a trajectory of sociological enquiry propelled by the figures who

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have been the most influential for me sociologically as I moved between Leeds, Oxford and Glasgow: in chronological order, John Rex, Herminio Martins, Raymond Williams, Terry Lovell and Pierre Bourdieu.

As a type of *homo academicus*, sociologists inhabit an unusual social space, historically a fusion between working-class men who are upwardly mobile and dominant class women (Bourdieu, 1988: 170–171). Within this space, I did not quite share the unease that is common to working-class men, but rather the cultural intimidation and anomie of the *déclassé bourgeois* (Durkheim, 1968: 252–253). My paternal grandfather, a wharf-owner, was held solely responsible – even at the time of the 1929–1930 Great Depression – for having plunged the family into bankruptcy, forcing my father to cut short his schooling. Financially, we were always more impoverished than our reference group; more ill-equipped, too, in terms of my parents' educational qualifications (cf. Runciman, 1966: 89). Moreover, growing up in rural Surrey, I felt humiliated by the local landowning aristocracy, who were both authoritarian and disdainful.

To compound this gap, in 1937 my father had nearly died in a car crash that gave him a stigmatizing limp and latent TB of the bone. The TB flared up episodically throughout his life, destroying one kidney and producing ulcers. As a consequence, the traditional gender division of labour was overturned: it was my mother who cheerfully took on the heavy digging and house-painting. In the last years of the Second World War (and after my birth, in 1943), my father became a State-trained civil engineer working in the Ministry of Agriculture to drain land for arable use; in the late 40s and 50s, they often employed Latvian and Lithuanian refugee labour. After 1960, following the privatization of this work, he was recruited as a manager of an agricultural firm. The subsequent tussles with locally-recruited labourers changed his character. Meanwhile, I went to a girls' grammar school in Guildford, Surrey and then, in 1961, to Leeds University.

I moved, then, from the 'soft South' to the much harsher North of the industrial revolution. In 1961, in Leeds, absolute poverty was still widespread: children could be seen barefooted in the street; the skilled worker's family – with whom I lodged – could afford only one child. The industrial cityscapes were new to me: the donkey-jacketed factory workers crisscrossing Woodhouse Moor morning and evening, the miners, with blue scars, in procession at the Durham Miners' gala, Pakistani and Indian men talking together after their mill-work in Love Lane, Bradford, young women with hair-rollers shopping before the Saturday evening Mecca Dances. . . . Even the street-names were evocative: Chapeltown – strewn with small churches – and Blackman Lane, still, then, a recent migrant area. . . . This was the Leeds of Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy*, Wilson's (1961) Pentecostal church in his *Sects and Society* and Thompson's (1963) Yorkshire mill-towns of *The Making of the English Working-Class*. Nor was it so different from the 1840s Northern factory world that Mrs Gaskell depicted in *North and South* and *Mary Barton* or that Dickens characterised in *Hard Times*. They, too, had felt the 'shock of the new' moving from South to North.

Glasgow, 5 years later, was very similar to Leeds, but with shipbuilding, train works and a Singer sewing-machine factory rather than textile mills and tanneries; it possessed, of course, an autonomous Scottish culture . . . I meant to stay a year or two in the sociology section of the Politics department. However, I fell in love with an Australian political philosopher with whom I had four children, including twins. Now that he has sadly died,

I can live nowhere else: Glasgow – including Glasgow Sociology – is engraved on my heart.

I was lucky enough to have my initial formation in the social sciences at Leeds from a group who – bar Martin Milligan, Roland Robertson and Cliff Slaughter – were predominantly exiles. Not all were Jewish intellectuals from haute bourgeois families, although the professor, Eugene Grebenik, *was* one such; rather, they were exiles from S. Africa (John Rex), Caetano's Portugal and Mozambique (Herminio Martins), American McCarthyism (Justin Grossman, Jerry Ravetz) and Czechoslovakia, Peter Nettl (cf. Turner, 2014, 2019: 571).

These, along with my lifelong student friends, Leslie Sklair, Ruth Doniach, Carmen Stevens and the presence of the African postgraduates – including Wole Soyinka – in the English Department, made an extraordinary impact on me. My original Church of England beliefs had already been philosophically contested by the Quaker Fabian and Catholic families with whom I had boarded, successively, in my two sixth-form years, so I was receptive to new angles of vision.

Rex's (1961) introductory sociology course in 1961–1962 broke with the naturalistic empiricism characteristic of British sociology, to assert the importance of theory construction. Deriving from an unusual combination of Marxism and a radical Weberianism, Rex's scintillating lectures emphasized the importance of a relational approach to social interaction and of the Popperian epistemological emphasis on falsifiability; they also offered a critique of Durkheimian tendencies to reify society into a group mind and were buttressed by a tradition of conflict analysis founded by Marx, Mannheim and Coser. Underlying all of these was Rex's own experience as a student leader of apartheid, and the need to situate theoretically the ensuing intense social conflict and personal dangers which had led him to flee S. Africa.¹ He crystallized in his lectures a fundamental truth:

Sacrificing theoretical clarity for the sake of obtaining easily quantitative data is at least as great a sin for the sociologist as sacrificing accuracy of measurement in order to obtain theoretical clarity. Indeed, it is a greater one because if true theoretical clarity is attained it should be possible to go on to achieve quantitative confirmation of theoretical hypotheses, whereas oversimplified operational definitions may actually prevent the attainment of theoretical clarity (Rex, 1961: 41]

Later, under the aegis of Martins and Robertson, I was to immerse myself for a period in Parsonian thought, despite the solid earlier foundations built by Rex. But in 1964 I read Lockwood's (1956) devastatingly lucid critique of the idealism of Parsons' *The Social System*, focussed as it was on socialization and deviance to the neglect of the substratum of conflicting material life chances and interests. His later, even better-known article (Lockwood, 1964), on the need to distinguish between system integration and social integration, conflated by Parsons, was also well-taken. Dennis Wrong and Ralf Dahrendorf hammered further nails into the Parsonian coffin, even if I doubted Dahrendorf's argument that conflicts over authority in the economic and religious 'imperatively coordinated organisations' are experienced identically. These Parsonian critics were introduced to us by Herminio Martins and Roland Robertson, despite the fact that – in a laudable desire to induct British sociologists into a more theoretical Continental

sociology à la *Structure of Social Action* – they had themselves become, for a while, nonconformist Parsonians. Quite quickly, such rigorously critical publications were to culminate in turning me away from even their dissenting version of structural-functionalism. . . so that, by 1965, Gouldner's searing indictment of Parsons in *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology* ended any death-pangs.

Rex departed from Leeds in 1962, and I became torn between the Marxism and the radical Weberianism that he had blended together. Politically, I moved into the orbit of the Socialist Labour League (SLL), with its anti-capitalist, anti-Stalinist stance and began to think of Marxism not as a rigid unilinear philosophy of history, but rather as a methodology (cf. Mandel, 1976). I sold the SLL newspaper round the neighbouring Yorkshire mining area pubs, sometimes accepting a kiss in return for the purchase of the paper. . .

Herminio Martins, at the opposite pole, also created a strong theoretical attraction. It was not just his self-styled 'Martinsian Marxism' (a contrapuntal variation on Althusserian Marxism) but his heritage of other currents of classical sociological theory, Weber particularly. Here I discovered the radical Durkheimian and Maussian tradition, down to Levi-Straussian structuralism, blended in Martins' thought with a powerful historical sociology. Most evident in Martins' (1974) extraordinary essay on *Time and Theory in Sociology*, his post-Parsonian work, drew attention to the constraints of the Western "microscopic reaction" to functionalism' with a particular lament for what Elias called 'the retreat into the present' (Turner, 2018: 185) and the ensuing 'inflationary cognitivism' of symbolic interactionism and ethno methods etc. (Martins cited in Jeronimo, 2018: 48). Coupled with Martins' able analyses of the 'reactionary modernism' of his native Portugal, from which he had become a stateless person, his powerful sociological theories of Keynesian-type developmentalism of Brazil, and his precocious, pre-Beck, condemnation of 'methodological nationalism' (Martins, 1974), these early articles indicated his fertile mind, which combined linguistic and sociological innovation with great erudition.

Most of all, I admired his extraordinary critical dissection of Kuhnian paradigm theory, especially in his welcome attempt to draw back from Kuhn's relativist conclusions so as (like Lakatos) to draw attention to areas of accumulated knowledge (or what he called 'epistemological meliorism') (Martins, 1972: 18, 29; Outhwaite, 2018: 82–83).² In his later years, Martins (2018) was to become equally pioneering with his critiques of technology as it moved into the medical treatment of the body or – in a new branch of eugenic biology – into a so called transhumanist breach with all human existence hitherto (pp. 22–27, 65–72). This sometimes witty and always unusually learned writings made a fundamental division between what he called Promethean uses of technology and Faustian uses of technology (Martins, 1993: 229, 231–232, 237–239, 241, 1998, 2018). He showed how the globalized firms of our time were breaking both ethical and scientific boundaries to produce 'world babies', to purchase kidneys for use by rich Americans or to indulge in cryogenics so as to perpetuate lifespans into unimaginable lengths (Martins, 2018: 51–129).

I was to benefit unexpectedly from Roland's sociology of religion. When I first came across Bourdieu's (1984) *Distinction*, I came across the latter's dictum that the sociology of culture is the sociology of religion of our time. But it was not Bourdieu but Robertson

who introduced me to Troeltsch's sect-church dialectic and the associated sociology of sectarianism. . . Much later, I, in turn, took this into my critique of over-mechanistic theories of avant-garde literary and artistic dynamics.³

It was in 1960s Leeds, too, that I was to learn, via the philosopher, Roy Enfield, of the Humean critique of the existence of God. This reinforced my fascination with Marx's early writings, then just translated by my tutor, Martin Milligan. But also – more or less independently – the first stirrings of feminism were implanted with de Beauvoir's (1953 [1949]) *The Second Sex* and I discovered the initial works of so-called culturalist Marxism: Williams' (1958) *Culture and Society* and *The Long Revolution* (1961) and, in 1963, E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*.

In my final year, I was struggling with the clash between Marx and Popper's devastating critique of historical materialism – in *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society* – a critique which I now see as targeting specifically the bastardised forms of Second and Third International Marxism, with their economically-reductive, unilinear theorists, such as Plekhanov (see Benjamin, 1973). Torn intellectually, I took leave of absence from the Socialist Labour League, never to return. But the heritage of my Marxist engagement has lasted to this day, yoked together with the Leeds 'ethic of suspicion' re empiricism.

I started a PhD in Sociology at Oxford (1964), where I was allocated Bryan Wilson as supervisor. Sociologically, Wilson offered a diet of standard Weberian fare on the sociology of religion and culture; personally, he had become a vitriolic elitist, decrying the 'yobs' who were invading the universities. But at Oxford I also attended Plamenatz's lectures on Marx as well as McIntyre, Pelszinski and Lukes' sparkling philosophy of social science seminars. These included on one occasion a paper given by Lucien Goldmann, whose *The Hidden God* greatly impressed me. Stephen Lukes introduced me to Raphael Samuel – who, in turn, gave me Georg Lukács, Goldmann's mentor, to read. The Parsonian conjecture was being replaced by forms of genetic structuralist and culturalist Marxism.

I changed my thesis topic from a sociology of contemporary literary movements to the sociology of women's magazines and popular romantic fiction, addressing (via content analysis) their historically-changing ideologies and utopia. At that point, Williams (1986) was becoming my sociological father, indeed, he was later to categorise himself as a sociologist of culture. What I took from him was a historical sociology of cultural forms, starting with *Culture and Society* (Williams, 1958) and subsequently, to *Keywords* (Williams, 1976). Sensitive to the changing meanings of words, confrontations over ideas are here related to the various *inflections of signs* that different classes (and other groups) deploy and fight over, a topic that I later discovered was addressed in the early 1920s by the sociolinguist, Voloshinov. Crucially, I liked Williams' wider theoretical clarifications of Marxism, notably in *Marxism and Literature*, where he illuminatingly addresses material and ideological determinism in terms of providing 'pressures' on – and 'setting limits' to – what may be thought and done.⁴

Williams' (1979) seminal idea of 'residual', 'dominant' and 'emergent' 'structures of feeling', permeating legitimate literature and popular culture alike, were also adopted as a more subtle version of Marxist analysis of consciousness (pp. 156–169). I began to see the novels studied in English Departments more anthropologically, especially – post-18th

century – as *the culture* of industrial societies. But this was the culture predominantly of the educated minority, some of whom like (George) Eliot, Hardy and Lawrence, not being Oxbridge-trained, were mistakenly regarded as autodidacts (Williams, 1970: 95–97, 119).

Against the contemporary grain, my disenchanting journeys into the archives of those popular magazine fictions read earlier by Hoggart led me to hold fast to Williams' distinction between 'ideology' and 'literature'. For this reason, I was persuaded by Williams' critique of Althusser (1971) and Williams' (1979) refusal to categorise all literary production as ideology (p. 172). Williams (1984 [1970], 1979) accepted that some more formulaic writing might be labelled 'ideological' but he famously linked the crucial tradition of 'literature' to new emergent forms and 'a very complex seeing'... As he put it: in the best works, such as the English authors Dickens, Charlotte, Emily and Anne Brontë and Mrs Gaskell, writing in 1848 – many of whom were once popular – there is a *depiction of social contradictions at the maximum intensity* (pp. 166–168). I also followed Williams' (1989) demonstration of how, over time, certain strands of modernism (once so revolutionary in form and meaning) had also become consecrated into the selective tradition. He argues that this is not in itself undesirable but that it may then be put to use so that its critical objectives are lost and its context – *what it was fighting against* – often disappears; these prescient points were all observations Bourdieu was to make later.

Williams' somewhat problematic term 'cultural materialism' was often linked to E. P. Thompson's Marxist historical studies, including Thompson's (1978) *The Poverty of Theory*. This excoriating essay, following a line of descent from Marx's *The Poverty of Philosophy* and Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism*, was particularly effective for its ironic demolition of the 'Althusserian orrery' or mechanistic base/superstructure models (Thompson, 1978: 292). The *Poverty of Theory* further ridiculed Althusser's formalism, the omission of any thoroughgoing empirical engagement, and, most egregiously, the philosopher's sweeping removal of human actors' experience of contradictions, thus rendering agents merely (unconscious) bearers of structures.⁵ Thompson's (1978) famous lampooning of Althusser's modelling of the 'relative autonomy' of the law (p. 288) was particularly salutary. I had adopted earlier Thompson's fundamental theoretical framework in *The Making*... in terms of a *relational approach* to class formation, which fitted my earlier sociological training from Rex and Lukes. In conjunction with reading Williams (1979: 172), the *Poverty of Theory* (Williams, 1978) was to expunge any residual Althusserian hankerings, well before Althusser strangled his wife.⁶

Many years later, I was to see Thompson's historical materialist intervention in *Poverty of Theory* as still having traces of Humean empiricism and an insufficient understanding of Kantian/ Durkheimian social categories of world-view (Bourdieu, 2019: 71–72, 83–87). At the time, Stuart Hall's synthesis, *Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms* Barrett (1980), offered a memorably well-informed and succinct analysis of the respective strengths and weaknesses of both structuralism and culturalism. Hall concluded that the two together were 'the names of the game'. That misunderstands the hegemonic character of a paradigm: on Kuhn's theory, there can only be *one* reigning paradigm. Be that as it may, it was undoubtedly this internally-conflicting heritage, together with classical sociological theory, that was to bring me into a fruitful dialogue with Bourdieu's later constructivist or genetic structuralism.

Sociology lecturing and research

But I am racing too far ahead. In 1966 I was offered a place in Glasgow's sociology section, soon to become an autonomous department under the path-breaking and benevolent leadership of John Eldridge. I was to stay there throughout my working life. Amongst my colleagues were many whose thought has impacted on me and with whom I have collaborated, like Ruth Madigan. Although split by divisions at times – for example, over whether sociological theory should be compulsory – this has been an environment in which I have felt nurtured. For me, it has been most memorable for the sociological theory and historical sociology advanced by Harvie Ferguson, David Frisby, Derek Sayer and Andrew Smith, its pioneering Centre for Industrial Democracy (John Eldridge et al), the Centre for Race and Ethnicity (especially under Virdee, 2019) and the Glasgow University Media Group (Eldridge, Philo et al). The latter – which suffered a backlash from journalists for its stringent criticism of BBC TV news – was also theoretically pioneering. It applied the latest ethnomethodology and symbolic interactionism – the dialectical reaction to Parsonian sociology – christened elsewhere the 'discover[y] of the infinitely small' (Bourdieu, 1982: 112). These detailed explorations of subjective meanings were then yoked fruitfully to the macrosociological theories of Marx, Weber and Mills. This Media Group approach was at the time unprecedented.⁷

By the 1970s I had encountered the work of Bourdieu (1971a, 1971b [1966], 1973[1971]) and (with Passeron) 1990 [1977]. Later, when *Distinction* first appeared (Bourdieu, 1984), it was his study of tastes in literature, music and art that fitted particularly well with my earlier work on popular literature. So when *The Alienated Reader* (Fowler, 1991) was published – the culmination of my work on magazine stories and popular novels – it was to have a lengthy chapter on women's reading patterns, based on qualitative research of West of Scotland readers. . . It was with the aid of Bourdieu's categories of taste that I theorised the ideal types of readers I discovered from my semi-structured interviews, linking this time-consuming empirical study into what was now fashionably called 'reception' (Iser, Jauss etc.).

Indeed, Bourdieu was to become a great teacher, from whose works I never cease to gain more with each rereading. What has differentiated my interest in Bourdieu from others have been three crucial issues. First, I have stressed his objectivist 'moment' – his emphasis on unconscious class, gender and linguistic determinants⁸ whereas for certain influential British Bourdieusians, it was principally his Husserlian and Heideggerian phenomenology that marked him out (e.g. Atkinson, 2016; Robbins, 2006: 534–535). Second, using my formation in the Marxist founding fathers of British cultural studies and history, I was interested in certain issues in Bourdieu's work in relation to popular literature and photography that culturalist Marxists had approached rather differently. And thirdly, unlike many, I did not see Bourdieu as a fatalistic sociologist of reproduction, but one who was trying to do something much more difficult: to theorise class power in different modes of production, with its transmission down the generations; but also to theorise *social transformation* and political margins of manoeuvre (Bourdieu, 2019: 72–76; Fowler, 2020).

Over the years, I have had to acknowledge that Marx's own theories of history lacked a sufficiently strong social psychology of classes (e.g. Chesnais, 2017: 272).⁹ In

particular, as Bourdieu (1987) argued, the structural position of the lowest social classes, with their lack of access to any capitals – economic, educational, social – has engendered *either* a traditional proletarian class consciousness, or a polarised religious worldview (as, frequently, in N. Ireland) *or* an anti-cosmopolitan nationalism (as with Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National*) (cf. also Piketty, 2020: 242–253). Thus, deploying Bourdieusian terms, we need to address the principles or categories of vision and division (including time) which also structure the habitus: a radical use of Kant, rather like that of Durkheim or Goldmann (1971).

Bourdieu (1996b) was crucial in revealing the *misrecognition* that opened the door to 'the state nobility' (dominant class) perpetuating their privileges. Less well-known, however, he also modelled a revolutionary situation, albeit a failed revolution, that of May 1968 (Bourdieu, 1988). Crucially, within this theoretical construction, a crisis in the higher educational sector *might have been* amplified through the conflicts between labour and capital in the industrial field, as well as through those conflicts that did occur – such as between generations in the media field – thus becoming synchronized to produce a general breakdown of ongoing social relations. Certain manifestations of this more generalised collapse of structures *were* evident in 1968, such as the suspension of normal time and speaking with the informal 'tu' instead of 'vous' to professors. . . But these changes in everyday life were insufficient to provoke a revolutionary rupture.

The further conditions for such a collapse are addressed by Bourdieu (2016) elsewhere. Secular prophets – such as Danny Cohn-Bendit – whose heterodoxies shatter the naturalised calm of the doxic view of the world were especially important (Bourdieu, 2016: 139). Paradoxically, this prophetic symbolic revolution is conceptualised as being that of a leader who is *chosen* by the group, whilst in turn *creating* the group or movement. It allows for the political revolution that is a prerequisite where there is a profound fracture of the dominant class and a crisis in everyday routines resulted from pandemic, recession, mass migration or war. Thus although the dominated learn a realistic accommodation to the world as they confront it, they are not exempt from suffering when these conditions worsen. It is in these anomic periods of disjuncture between expectations and reality that a prophetic figure or figures may use the margins of liberty or space for manoeuvre to introduce new principles of vision.

Glasgow sociology: The 1970s and on

In the 70s, feminism in Glasgow had a strong practical dimension or self-interest. In the case of the four initial female staff, this meant becoming professional sociologists in a university that, as well as being marked structurally by class, whiteness, anti-Catholicism and masculinity, also defined sociology as an academic interloper. I can recall the stern warning of one of the department's historical sociologists, Kirsty Larner: 'As a woman you must work twice as hard as a man; as a mother, you must work three times as hard. . .'

Classical sociological theorists did not give an enormous amount of help on patriarchal domination, although Marx *had* written that 'The barometer of civilization is the degree of emancipation of women. . .', whilst Simmel and Weber had encouraged a milieu in which women were breaking new boundaries. But crucial second-wave works

were coming out then: Greer (1970) on *The Female Eunuch*, Mitchell's (1971) *Women's Estate* and Barrett's (1980) *Women's Oppression Today*. We discussed the thesis of a dual but seamless revolution – against both capitalism and patriarchy – through works like Hartmann (1981) and Choderow (1978). These books began to be taught on the curriculum, as did the social historians' debate over gender and class re women's work (Michèle Barrett and Mary McIntosh, Johanna Brenner and Maria Ramas, Eleanor Gordon and Jane Humphries).

Along with Howard Becker's *Artworlds*, I adopted as a key text for the sociology of literature and art course the work of another Marxist-feminist, Janet Wolff.

My own research was particularly indebted not just to her but to two lucid feminist thinkers in the sociology of culture, an American, Rita Felski and the Leeds/ Essex/ Warwick sociologist, Terry Lovell.

When I interviewed Bourdieu (1991) in the Collège de France in the mid-1990s, not long after he had published his theoretically compelling but flawed article on masculine domination, one of the issues I raised was his silence about the nature and consequences of masculine domination for women's literary and artistic production. For, particularly after the rupture of modernism, 'middlebrow' and 'industrial popular' genres (Bourdieu, 1984, 1996a) tended to be the only social arena for female authors (as for male authors of working-class origin), not the space of *legitimate* literary production.

We also discussed Williams, at some length, especially on the relationship in literature between class and 'knowable communities'. Unexpectedly, I discovered he saw clear affinities between himself and Williams, the Welsh son of a railway signalman. I also introduced T.J. Clark, the situationist art historian, into this dialogue. Bourdieu (2013) had not then read his epoch-making work on Manet, *The Painting of Modern Life*, but he later went on to address it as a 'classic' in his very last lectures (p. 270 et seq.). After I had raised the vexed issue of consecratable popular culture,¹⁰ it was discussion of the sociologically-attuned writings on feminist aesthetics by Felski (1989) and Lovell (1980, 1987) with which we ended our memorable encounter. He promised to read these works, but that may have been a vow his subsequent cancer made him unable to keep.

Terry Lovell had also been a student and colleague of Herminio's at Leeds and Essex before going on to teach sociology and gender divisions at Warwick. Her work was highly influential for me in numerous ways – especially on the 19th century novel. She undertook, for example, a well-informed sociological analysis of the social requirements for canonization, given that only two and a half women had made it into the British 'great tradition' (Eagleton, 1983, Lovell, 1987).¹¹ Material and temporal prerequisites made such recognition particularly difficult for women, she argued, from finding money to be relieved of domestic tasks, to the freeing of time to write a sufficient *quantity* (sic) of literary work.

My work on Bourdieusian sociology of culture applied these ideas about masculine domination along with theories about class and region, to the production of middlebrow and popular literature (Fowler, 1997: 134–173). For example, I have raised certain concerns with Bourdieu's (1996a) well-known opposition to 'popili-literature' that is, to those intellectuals' illusions (in his view) leading them to *neglect* the generic and literary cultural capital required for making a mark in the field. This in itself is persuasive but, for me, his sociology of culture, with its emphasis on the chiasmatic cultural field

(Bourdieu, 1996a), is prone to too high a level of abstraction – it misses late transitions from the commercial/ mass field to the restricted artistic field.¹²

Raymond Williams has a rather different approach to popular culture in general and literature in particular, distinguishing between ‘literature’ as possessing a ‘complex seeing’ (whether ‘high’ or ‘low’) and other popular literary forms such as certain magazine stories, which lack this. We can still see, after the rupture of modernism, certain genuinely popular writers, such as Thomas Hardy, who, despite crushing criticism, eventually achieved recognition in the artistic field. Williams and Bourdieu, I would argue, need to be combined in innovative ways.

Thus in other sociological theories of the literary field, the gatekeepers who bear a popular text into a consecrated space – curricula, prize candidature, prestigious publishers, classic reprints – have been the object of close attention (Dubois, 1978).¹³ Social movements – including under a nationalist banner – are also highly conducive to certain popular writers being subsequently re-evaluated in literary terms. These studies of production and consecration are now being particularly enriched by studies of the world republic of literature and postcolonial literature, including by Bourdieu’s former PhD students (Casanova, 2004, Sapiro, 2014).

Rethinking class

Lovell’s (2004) later work contributed an excoriating critique of sociologists of individuation, such as Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, who have argued that class is a ‘zombie’ category. Drawing on Bourdieu’s (1987) *Distinction*, but also on his ‘classic’ text *What Makes a Social Class?* she noted that Bourdieu refers to classes in unusually broad terms – arguably too broad – but prescient in terms of feminism:

A ‘class’ *be it social, sexual, ethnic or otherwise* exists when there are agents capable of imposing themselves as authorised to speak, to act officially in its place and its name, upon whom, by recognising themselves in these plenipotentaries [. . .] recognise themselves as members of the class, and in doing so, confer upon it the only form of existence a group *can* possess. (Bourdieu, 1987: 15 cited Lovell, 2004: 48).

If the working-class has been a ‘well-founded social construction’ (Bourdieu, 1987: 9), she suggests that there may be a similar process of group-formation for women. Such group-creation – perhaps via female ‘plenipotentaries’ – addresses both the lack of social ‘recognition’ experienced collectively by women as a status-group and also the maldistribution of material rewards for equal work. But she also cites my earlier work to suggest that by individuating women methodologically and neglecting their relationship to families, the effect of *dual high incomes* might have gone unregistered:

to relieve this form of gender domination may have unintended consequences from the point of view of social class inequalities’ (Lovell, 2004: 52).

This is all the more true, given that the feminist movement has often ignored the clashing interests that separate women, for example, professional/businesswomen as against female domestic labour (frequently migrants) (Fowler, 2003). I might add,

following Fraser's recent arguments, that further unintended consequences derive from the way in which capitalism has recuperated feminism as 'the new spirit of capitalism'.

[R]esignifying" aspects of second-wave feminism has given neoliberalism a fresh legitimacy as "modern" and "free", whilst simultaneously weakening class divisions in terms of capital and labour (Fraser, 2013: 210–211, 217–220).

However unfashionable a category amongst Westminster neolabourites, class was never reduced to a 'zombie' category amongst sociologists in Glasgow, a city of industrial and deindustrialised spaces where cultural policy has spawned not so much individuated strategies of distinction, as instrumental urban boosterism (cf. Sklair, 2017). But such strategic interests have never quite effaced the collective memory of Red Clydeside, and with it, Red Vienna and Red Berlin (1910–1930). Frequently perceived even *by non-sociologists* as intersectional, movements of 'identity' such as the women's movement have had strong working-class roots in the rent strike-based resistance of spokeswomen such as Mary Barbour and Agnes Dollan; similarly, the Scottish Immigrant Labour Council (1960s–1980s) welcomed S. Asian migrants within a class and trade union framework (Miles and Muirhead, 1986: 128) and, in 1984–1985, gay and lesbian campaigns offered support to striking miners.

Within certain limits, I welcome a sociology that embraces analysis of social constructions such as 'race', queer, trans, asexual, disabled etc., while offering resources to combat minorities' demonisation. I know from experience that these constructions often have an existential salience more powerful than those of class or generation.¹⁴ However, I am bitterly opposed to those sociologists who think that the specialist study of such fragments can be undertaken as though divorced from analysis of the wider social world.

In this respect, it disturbs me when contemporary feminist academics speak of 'equality' to mean gender equality, obscuring socioeconomic inequality from consciousness. Indeed, in the last few years it has fallen to an economist, Piketty, to shine a spotlight on this dimension of accentuated inequality in 'hypercapitalist' societies and to spell out once more the danger of nationalist 'identitarian' reactions to these (Piketty, 2020: 1).¹⁵ It is even more gratifying to see Piketty, after his Herculean labours, refer admiringly to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) as having elaborated the major ideological support for hyper-capitalism, namely, 'meritocratic illusions' (Piketty, 2020: 711–713).

My own sociological stance has been shaped by my thriving department and the sociology profession internationally. I owe much, too, to the Network for Socialist Theory and Movements, founded in 1981 by Hillel Ticktin, Scott Meikle and Paddy O'Donnell and driven by a radical humanism. The Network has provided an arena for theoretical analyses not just of movements such as postcolonialism or the contemporary renewed cooperative movement, but also analyses of gift exchange in modern societies, such as the cultures of solidarity across blue-/ white-collar divisions in the 1984/5 UK miners' strike. Such studies provide a less unmitigatedly bleak vision of gift exchange (Bourdieu, 2000: 194) than do the standard disenchanted readings of Bourdieu's studies of Béarn and Kabylean peasant societies (e.g. Alexander, 1995). In particular they feed into a wider model of *reciprocity over time* as crucial to our understanding of a realist economic anthropology, which might complement or even replace the existing overweening

market, in universities and elsewhere (Bourdieu, 2017: 28–43, 61; Martins, 2018: 59–86)

Conclusion

I have spent much of my time since the early 1990s on Bourdieu. Yet I also possess a deep-rooted indebtedness to Marx and the Western historical materialist tradition. I continue to read Marx with unabated, if critical, absorption and not least, because – against Brubaker (1985) – I regard him as an important, but often encrypted influence on Bourdieu (Fowler, 2011). The illuminations offered by Marx's spiritual heirs, such as Walter Benjamin, have also helped me generate theories relating to new empirical areas (see, e.g. *The Obituary as Collective Memory* (2005) where I acknowledge my debt to Benjamin, Bourdieu and Halbwachs)

For me, there has been a persistent tension between the two great sociologists, Marx and Weber, despite works that emphasize their similarities (Sayer, 1991). Weber has helped me recognise the radicalism of Bourdieu's work on prophecy and change, interpreted with all its full ideological and ethical importance by Sapiro (see Fowler, 2021). I would also connect this with the heritage of Martins, who reminds us that Weber always saw sociology as motivated by value-derived enquiry, and thus as going further than the mere middle-range analysis, into rational critique (cited Jeronimo, 2018: 40).

But, for me, there is also a stumbling-block to taking on, wholesale, Martins' radical Weberianism – as typified in Weber's *Religious Rejections of the World and their Direction*, his bitter critiques of the heteronomous controls to which workers are submitted in the rationalization of industry, and his indictments of the human wastage of everyday 'iron' constraints: 'specialists without spirit . . . [etc.]'.

These Weberian themes, founded on his rigorous analyses of bureaucratic, corporate capitalism, have been well mined by John Rex and John Eldridge, along with other valuable writers. But Weber's antinomies – especially his vision of history and of humanity – are still, for me, deeply problematic. This is partly because of his hatred of the socialist tradition (e.g. 'Liebknecht belongs in the madhouse and Rosa Luxemburg in the zoological gardens'),¹⁶ and partly because of his Eurocentrism (see for e.g. *The Religion of China*. . .). Thus when I use Marx and Weber as theoretical resources for my own enquiries, I do not draw on a unified sociological discipline. It is misleading, in my view, to encourage students to seek the mastery of a single consistent, harmonious architectural construction. As opposed to this we should foster a set of theoretical models, concepts and empirical discoveries which require us constantly to be with Marx against Marx and to set Marx against Weber, Weber against Durkheim etc (cf. Bourdieu, 1990: 49). Further, I increasingly see the need to relate the internally fraught but fertile sociological tradition – which draws on all of these – to the better-known history of certain key philosophical ideas: Pascal, Leibniz, Cassirer etc. This is obviously important for an adequate sociology of knowledge, but it is also important for developing an adequate theoretical armoury for *any* new theoretical sociological project.

Bourdieu, a great champion of social *science*, was in fact drawing on both disciplinary resources throughout his life, in a quest for a coherent social theory. In this respect he may come to be seen as producing a symbolic Copernican revolution in thought, just as

Kant once did in relation to rationalism and empiricism. My hope is that far from producing a sterile, formulaic orthodoxy such as Durkheimian thought became in France in the 1950s (Bianco and de Laclos, 2016: 195–196; Bourdieu, 1990: 4–5), he will continue in future to generate fertile new developments at the highest level.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. A critic of the 'colour bar' by the age of 11, I was later to be better informed about the nature of apartheid by social scientists who had fled South African police, such as Hillel Ticktin (Prof. of Marxist Studies), Gerda Siann (the feminist professor of psychology and Consul for Rwanda) and Stan Cohen (the sociologist).
2. Susen has examined further the degree of Bourdieu's later success in opening up third road between Kantian absolute universal knowledge (or scholastic logic) and Nietzschean relativism with his 'social, situated and practical reason' (Susen, 2007: especially 158–167).
3. Troeltsch had argued that sects had a tendency over generations to become church-like and accommodate to the world, but Wilson argued, persuasively, that this was only true of certain sects – evangelical missionaries of salvation, for example, not revolutionary millenarian movements . . . Similarly Bourdieu and other Bourdieusians had argued re avant-garde movements that they were all liable, over time, to be canonised and to dilute their critical anti-capitalist meanings. In contrast, I argued that some, such as the American Harlem Renaissance writers and painters (1910–1939), continued to reject radically both racialized white privilege and socio-economic inequality, even with the passage of generations (Bourdieu, 1996a; Fowler, 2021; Sapiro, 2014).
4. His argument here bears comparison with Weber's famous analogy of railway tracks and switchpoints.
5. See also Bourdieu's critique of Thompson (2019: 65), and Nield and Seed (1979).
6. Despite this, I still found the ideas of Wolff (1993 [1981]) and Eagleton – forged in that same Althusserian smithy – offered clarifying theoretical constructions in the late 70s and 80s that were analytically useful in teaching the sociology of art and literature.
7. Their conclusions about systematic bias were based on content analyses of the televised spoken and visual news presentations rather than the written scripts. The Media Group's books made waves in the British Establishment, not least in the BBC itself, but are now seen as foundational within the sociology of media. It is to the detriment of Bourdieu's (1998) *On Television and Journalism* that this book did not discuss such works.
8. See, for example, his emphasis on the crisis in the Academic mode of painting after the two 1848 revolutions resulting from the huge increase in the number of students with the bac at the Ecole des Beaux Arts following aristocratic families' return to France. This produced the scholastic conditions for the introduction of a new, non-Academic, anomic mode of painting pioneered by the 'heresiarch', Manet (Bourdieu, 2013).

9. Of course, this critique was fundamental to the Weberian tradition and to the first publications of Goldthorpe and Lockwood, et al. in the 1960s and 70s. But it has taken many years of historical change, including the substantial removal from the West of the industrial conditions described in Broué (2005 [1971]), for a similar recognition to appear in the Marxist tradition: hence the pathos of a lifelong Marxist such as Chesnais, now over 80.
10. On this issue, he showed me a copy of his new book, *La Misère du Monde*, (1993), then just published: 'This' he remarked 'is the real popular culture!'
11. For Eagleton, Jane Austen and George Eliot had been fully canonised, but Emily Bronte was only a 'marginal case' (1983: 33).
12. Similarly, for Bourdieu, canonisation of photography was unlikely, precisely because of the social uses of the already consecrated artistic forms, such as painting, sculpture, literature and music, both for education and status adornment (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1990). But in fact, since he wrote, certain exponents of this so called 'middlebrow art' have now been canonised. Ironically, when this occurred, it was by moving 'straight photography' into artistic spaces, introducing a formalist reading of photographs and by applying the vocabulary of 'genius' to the photographer (Phillips, 1987)
13. It is noteworthy that Becker's *Art-Worlds distinguishes* between folk; naïve or maverick; craft; and 'integrated professional' artworks rather than between literary/artistic and 'bestselling' works. In the 'professional' category, he addresses the processes of both upstreaming (or consecrating) writers and their potential downstreaming (discarded from libraries, etc.); he does not assume that literary 'professionals' are likely to be *devoid* of bestselling qualities.
14. One of my three sons is gay: although very gentle himself, he has been beaten up in a form of homophobic abuse on two occasions, once nearly losing an eye.
15. Sociologists have developed these ideas for example, Andrew Sayer, Diane Reay, Sam Friedmann. . . but it is Piketty's (2014, 2020) historical analyses of wealth and income that particularly stand out here.
16. On this point, see *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* (1984) 1/16 441 [1919], cited Radkau, 2009: 507.

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